

How to Have Difficult Conversations

Global Immersion Project Webinar; originally aired 4/25/2018

Intro – Jon Huckins

Conflict is not a problem to fix but an opportunity for transformation. Moving through conflict with tools to heal leads to deepened relationships. Peace = wholistic repair of relationship. Conflict is not the problem but our inability to move well toward conflict. When we ignore hard conversations, broken stuff doesn't get fixed. But if we go into hard conversations without adequate tools, we do not contribute to the healing.

Most of us have not been taught to engage conflict well, so we fight (to win), or flee. Choose instead to learn from one another.

Race – Jonathan Brooks

- Discussing race is important, AND it makes us uncomfortable.
- People of the dominant culture must deal with the collective sin of oppression, white supremacy and the part it has played in the creation of society.
- It confronts “comfort” as an American ideal: only a portion of the population can regularly enjoy comfort.
- It confronts the concept of “colorblindness”:
 - Race is not about skin color but power. Racial words were code for people’s places in the hierarchy of the US system.
 - Become color-competent: understand history and your contribution, your part in it.
 - It’s critical to understand that race is about power. The system created power dynamics that mean people of the dominant culture never had to learn about the history, stories, or culture of people of color. The experiences of the dominant culture have become the norm.
- The dominant culture **must** become students, take responsibility to become racially competent.
- Give people of color permission to retreat from a difficult conversation – It is possible that trauma (personal or systemic) is being remembered/replayed.
- When people of the dominant culture expect people of color to educate them, it puts the dominant culture back into the center, and puts people of color in the place of making us comfortable again.
 - Do the research and **then** enter into dialogue about what we have learned.
- Unhelpful:
 - Do not dismiss people’s lived experience. Try to understand their story better.
 - Don’t replace racism with classism; they are inextricably linked. It is not either/or, but both/and.
 - For dominant-culture people: decide to be less dominant, less comfortable.
 - For people of color: don’t get stuck thinking that your lived experience as a person of color is enough. People of color also need to become educated about their history and culture.
- Invitation to people of the dominant culture: confession, formation. Live a cross-shaped life. Recognize that we tend to create God in our own image. Jesus himself was part of a poor and marginalized group.

Politics – Kristen Howerton

- When Christians pledge their allegiance to America (politics) *ahead* of our allegiance to the gospel, it leads to great polarization. Not reflective of the One we follow.
- How to have political conversations with those who oppose my views:
 - Be vulnerable – it creates the ability to have conversations. Have empathy for the other person; they’ve come to their viewpoint through their own lived experiences.
 - Start with shared values, then move on to how these values are implemented.
 - Use basic conversation rules (kindness, not interrupting, timing, listen more than talk, ...)

- Talk from personal experience, not ideology.
- Don't make value judgements (e.g., if the other person uses the term "brown races," don't automatically label them as a racist.)
- Use appropriate terminology; perhaps simplify vocabulary.
- Use external resources: read books, listen to podcasts, news programs, documentaries, etc. from opposite points of view and discuss.
- Know the facts and use reliable sources.
- Lose the objective of proving myself or of having an agenda.
- Be willing to be uncomfortable. It is the job of white people (those of the dominant culture) to have these conversations with other white people.
- Be willing to be wrong. Be humble, teachable.
- Stop just hearing *about* people and start hearing *from* people, esp those who think differently.
 - Disagreement is necessary for a democracy to flourish.
 - Move toward seeing our differences as a gift. (This is challenging!)

Theology – Aaron Niequist

- Get curious.
 - Why does something matter to the other person?
 - Get underneath the argument and empathize with the why, even if I disagree with how it is stated.
 - Also be curious about myself: why am I reacting to the conversation?
- Learn to forgive those who have hurt and disappointed me.
 - In God's presence, spend a minute telling God the things about the other person that drive me crazy.
 - In God's presence, spend a minute telling God all the things I imagine drive that person crazy about me.
 - Pray that God will bless that person.
 - Ask God to bless me as I forgive.
- The goal is not to become theologically smarter but to live into my theology, to become a reflection of my theology.
 - Become the kind of person who can *have* a constructive conversation; don't just *learn* about having a constructive conversation. Requires transformation.

Having a conversation with those who are overtly racist:

- Learn how to stand against racism while being willing to stay in relationship.
- When a person continues in racism, then we have to stand against it.
- Stay around the table with those we differ with and have influence with (and be open to their positive influence on us).
- Bring people back to their values and discuss how they might be contributing to systemic racism and oppression. Together, examine the values and how certain policies do/don't support those values.

Click the link below to watch the webinar from which these notes were compiled.

<http://globalimmerse.org/blog/webinar-conversations/>

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